

January 2, 2014
1420 East 6th Ave.
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Environmental Quality Council
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Fisheries Bureau
Endangered Species Coordinator
Native Species Coordinator - Fisheries
Missoula Office

Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation
Wayne Hadley, 1016 Eastside Road, Deer Lodge, MT 59722
Montana River Action Network, 304 N 18th Ave., Bozeman, MT 59715
North Powell Conservation District, 1002 Hollenback Road, Suite C, Deer Lodge, MT 59722
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Big Blackfoot Chapter Trout Unlimited, P.O. Box 1, Ovando, MT 59854
Lincoln Ranger District, 1569 Highway 200, Lincoln, MT 59639

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared for the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The Program tentatively plans to provide partial funding to a project calling for replacing an existing, undersized road culvert located on Gleason Creek with a much larger corrugated steel arch-pipe. Gleason Creek is a tributary to Nevada Creek. The intent of this project is to enhance upstream migratory connectivity for westslope cutthroat trout and possibly bull trout. This proposed project is located on U.S. Forest Service Road 296 approximately 5 miles east of the community of Finn in Powell County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., February 3, 2014 to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Helena at the address listed above. Funding for this project through the Future Fisheries Improvement Program is contingent upon approval being granted by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (406) 444-2432. Please note that this draft EA will be considered as final if no substantive comments are received by the deadline listed above.

Sincerely,

Mark Lere, Program Officer
Habitat Bureau
Fisheries Division
e-mail: mlere@mt.gov

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Gleason Creek Fish Passage Enhancement Project

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-272 through 273 that directs the Department to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The program involves providing funding for physical projects to restore degraded fish habitat in rivers and lakes for the purpose of improving wild fisheries. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to help accomplish this goal. Additionally, the 1999 Montana Legislature amended statute sections 87-1-273, 15-38-202 and Section 5, Chapter 463, Laws of 1995 to create a bull trout and cutthroat trout enhancement program. The legislation was amended again in 2103 to open the program to all native fish species (statute section 87-1-283). The program now calls for the enhancement of native fish through habitat restoration, natural reproduction and reductions in species competition by way of the Future Fisheries Program.

The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is proposing to provide partial funding to a project calling for the replacement of an undersized culvert located at a U.S. Forest Service road crossing on Gleason Creek with a much larger corrugated steel arch-pipe. The existing 48-inch in diameter culvert is undersized, impedes upstream fish passage in higher flows and is causing impairments to the stream channel. Replacing this culvert with a larger arch-pipe would improve migratory connectivity to approximately 3 miles of Gleason Creek. The intent of the project is to improve upstream fish passage for a slightly hybridized population of westslope cutthroat trout, and possibly bull trout. The project site is located on Gleason Creek approximately 5 miles east of the community of Finn in Powell County on U.S. Forest Road 296.

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted Gleason Creek located within Township 12 North, Range 8 West, Section 22 in Powell County (Attachment 1).

II. Need for the Project: One goal within Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks six-year operations plan for the fisheries program is to “restore and enhance degraded fisheries habitats” by implementing habitat restoration projects and administering the Future Fisheries Improvement Program to restore important habitats on private and public lands. This proposed project would help meet this goal.

Gleason Creek is a tributary to Nevada Creek and ultimately the Blackfoot River that supports a slightly hybridized population of westslope cutthroat trout and limited bull trout use. Currently, upstream fish passage is hindered by an undersized U.S. Forest Service road culvert located near stream mile 0.1 (Attachment 2). This project calls for replacing the existing 48-inch round culvert with a 137-inch by 87-inch corrugated steel arch pipe. The new culvert is designed to replicate the streambed located both upstream and downstream of the crossing, allowing uninhibited passage for all aquatic organisms. The proposed project has been identified as a priority under the Department of Agriculture’s Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program.

III. Scope of the Project:

The existing undersized 48-inch in diameter culvert would be replaced with a 137-inch by 87- inch corrugated steel arch-pipe (Attachment 3). A series of 4 rock weirs would be installed inside the new pipe

to maintain streambed materials and reduce water velocities. The new structure dimensions were based on stream channel characteristics collected both from a reference reach and from hydraulic analyses. The hydraulic capacity of the structure was analyzed to ensure that the dimensions satisfied a 100-year flood event. This project is expected to cost \$58,650.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$10,000.00. The remainder of the funding would come from outside sources and in-kind services:

Contributor	In-kind services	In-kind cash
USFS		\$45,270.00
Big Blackfoot Chapter TU	\$3,380.00	

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Replacing an undersized culvert that currently hinders upstream fish passage during periods of high flows with a much larger arch-pipe would enhance upstream passage for all aquatic organisms and improve migratory connectivity to about 3 additional miles of Gleason Creek. A slightly hybridized population of westslope cutthroat trout residing in the stream likely would benefit from the project.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Short-term increases in turbidity will occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, the operation of equipment in the active stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable. The Department of Environmental Quality will be contacted to determine narrative conditions required to meet short-term water quality standards and protect aquatic biota (318 authorization). A 124 permit (Montana Stream Protection Act) will be obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers will be contacted to determine the need to meet 404 provisions of the Clean Water Act.

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils along the stream margin would be temporarily disturbed during construction. All disturbed areas would be re-vegetated with a native grass seed mix.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Vegetation and cover would be disturbed during the period of construction. However, proposed re-vegetation efforts in the form of seeding with a native mix of grass seed would mitigate this disturbance.

5. Aesthetics.

In the short term, aesthetics would be adversely impacted due to ground disturbance and the presence of heavy construction equipment.

7. Unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources.

Enhancing migratory connectivity to an additional 3 miles of Gleason Creek is expected to benefit a slightly hybridized population of westslope cutthroat trout. Westslope cutthroat trout are considered a species of special concern in Montana.

9. Historic and archaeological sites.

The project site previously has been disturbed by the construction of the U.S. Forest Service road and culvert crossing. As a result, there is a very low likelihood that cultural properties will be impacted by the proposed project. Should cultural materials be inadvertently discovered during the project, the State Historic Preservation Office will be contacted and the site will be investigated.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

13. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals.

This project has been identified as a priority under the Department of Agriculture's Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program; a program established in 2009 by the Secretary of Agriculture to encourage the collaborative, science-based, ecosystem restoration of priority forest landscapes.

14. Transportation networks & traffic flows.

Public traffic would need to be delayed, interrupted, or re-routed during the period of construction.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no Future Fisheries funding is provided, the applicant would have to either seek other sources of funding to complete the project or upstream fish passage on a portion of Gleason Creek would continue to be impeded. Habitat conditions for a slightly hybridized westslope cutthroat trout population would remain degraded.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to provide partial funding to enhance migratory connectivity for a slightly hybridized westslope cutthroat trout population in Gleason Creek by replacing an undersized culvert with a much larger arch-pipe. The new arch-pipe would provide year-round upstream passage for all aquatic organisms.

VIII. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section

1. Is an EIS required? No.

We conclude from this review that the proposed activities will have a positive impact on the physical and human environment.

2. Level of public involvement.

The project application to the Future Fisheries Improvement Program has been posted on the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks webpage for public comment. No comments have been received to date. The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission also will review the proposed project and funding will be contingent upon their approval. The Environmental Assessment (EA) is being distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter. The EA also will be published on Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks webpage: fwp.mt.gov.

3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5:00 PM on February 3, 2014

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

Mark Lere, Program Officer
Habitat Bureau
Fisheries Division
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
1420 East 6th Avenue
Helena, MT 59620
Telephone: (406) 444-2432
e-mail: mlere@mt.gov

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS

1420 E 6th Ave, PO BOX 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701

(406) 444-2535

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Title Gleason Creek Fish Passage Enhancement Project

Division/Bureau Fisheries Division -Future Fisheries Improvement

Description of Project The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is proposing to provide partial funding to a project calling for the replacement of an undersized culvert located at a U.S. Forest Service road crossing on Gleason Creek with a much larger corrugated steel arch-pipe. The intent of the project is to enhance upstream fish passage for a slightly hybridized population of westslope cutthroat trout. The project site is located 5 miles east of the community of Finn in Powell County on U.S. Forest Service Road 296.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Terrestrial & aquatic life and habitats			X			X
2. Water quality, quantity & distribution			X			X
3. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture			X			X
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality			X			X
5. Aesthetics			X			X
6. Air quality				X		
7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources			X			X
8. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		X

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

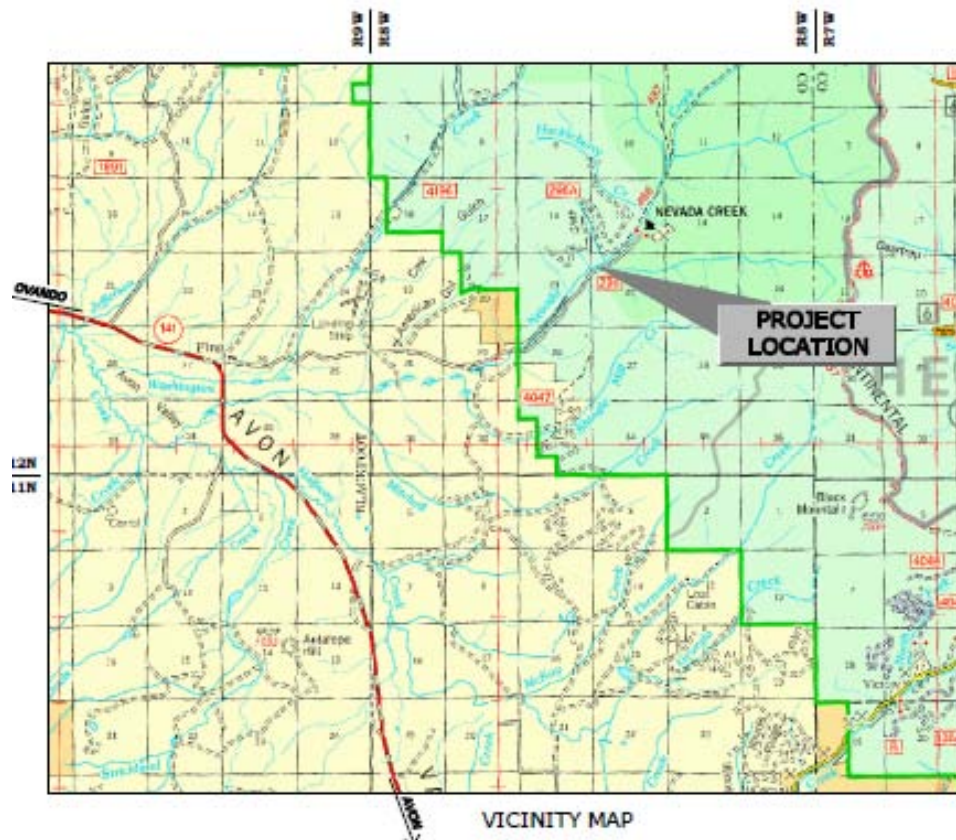
	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Social structures & mores				X		
2. Cultural uniqueness & diversity				X		
3. Local & state tax base & tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural or industrial production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		
7. Access to & quality of recreational and wilderness activities			X			X
8. Quantity & distribution of employment				X		
9. Distribution & density of population & housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial & commercial activity				X		
12. Demands for energy				X		
13. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals			X			X
14. Transportation networks & traffic flows			X			X

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction North Powell Conservation District, US Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corp of Engineers, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, State Historic Preservation Office

Individuals or groups contributing to this EA Ryen Neudecker, Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited
 Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

EA prepared by: Mark Lere

Date: December 26, 2013



Map showing project location on Gleason Creek.

ATTACHMENT 1



Existing road culvert on Gleason Creek.

ATTACHMENT 2

